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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to the field of computer networks. In particular, the invention relates to accounting and billing for services in a computer network.

B. Description of the Related Art

The low cost of Internet connectivity and a wide range of services are driving and more people onto the Internet, which is driving the deployment of TCP/IP networks. This process has led to a new market of client-server applications that enables the user to interact with other users and computer systems around the world. The use of these applications is consuming more and more Intranet and Internet bandwidth.

New applications such as "voice over IP (Internet Protocol)" and streaming audio and video require even more bandwidth and a different quality of service than email, or other less real-time applications. Also, the type quality of service can vary according to the needs of the user. For example, typically, businesses do not tolerate unavailable network services as easily as consumers. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) therefore would like to price their available bandwidth according to a user's needs. For